

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PARIS 33586 232216Z

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TAGS: PORG, EEC, FR

SUBJECT: POPULARLY ELECTED EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT --

A SAFE ISSUE FOR GISCARD

SUMMARY: DECISION BY ROME EC SUMMIT MEETING TO
SCHEDULE POPULAR ELECTION OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT FOR
1978 HAS BECOME THE SUBJECT OF FRENCH INTERNAL
POLITICAL DEBATE. AS ON OTHER ISSUES WHICH HAVE
INVOLVED FRENCH "INDEPENDENCE", ELEMENTS OF BOTHE RIGHT
AND LEFT ARE FIGHTING THE IDEA, WITH MORE MODERATE
FORMATIONS BACKING THE ROME DECISION. BUT IN CONTRAST
TO SOME PREVIOUS OUTCOMES, IT APPEARS THAT THIS TIME
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PAGE 02 PARIS 33586 232216Z

THE CENTER WILL HOLD. END SUMMARY

1. DIVISIONS WITHIN THE MAJORITY: THE DECISION BY DECEMBER ROME EC SUMMIT MEETING SETTING 1978 AS DATE FOR DIRECT POPULAR ELECTION OF STRASBOURG-BASED EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT HAS TOUCHED OFF AN INTERNAL FRENCH POLITICAL DEBATE, PRODUCING DIVISIONS IN MAJORITY AND OPPOSITION RANKS ALIKE. WITHIN THE PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY, SEVERAL GAULLIST (UDR) "BARONS" PREDICTABLY ARE LEADING THE FIGHT AGAINST 1978 ELECTIONS. FORMER PRIME MINISTER MICHEL DEBRE LED OFF THE ATTACK LAST WEEK WITH A FRONT PAGE LE MONDE ARTICLE COMPARING A POPULARLY ELECTED EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT TO "ATLANTICISM" AND PREDICTING THAT ITS INSTITUTION WOULD LEAD TO "NATIONAL SUICIDE." FOLLOWING UP IN ANOTHER LE MONDE PIECE, FORMER UDR SECRETARY GENERAL ALEXANDRE SANGUINETTI CALLED FOR A "NEW RESISTANCE" TO THE IDEA WHICH HE CLAIMED WOULD LEAD TO THE "EFFACEMENT OF THE FRENCH NATION." FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER JOBERT HAS ALSO THROWN HIS LIMITED FOLLOWING INTO THE FIGHT AGAINST 1978 ELECTIONS. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MAJORITY, PRESIDENT GISCARD'S INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN PARTY, CENTRISTS AND UDR PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC, LEADING MORE MODERATE GAULLIST ELEMENTS, ARE FIRMLY BACKING THE ROME DECISION.

2. AND IN THE OPPOSITION: THE LEFT IS, IF ANYTHING, EVEN MORE SERIOUSLY SPLIT OVER THE ISSUE. FOR MONTHS NOW THE COMMUNISTS (PCF) HAVE BEEN PUBLICLY CHASTIZING THEIR SOCIALIST (PS) PARTNERS FOR WHAT THEY SEE AS UNSEEMLY PS COOPERATION WITH "SOCIAL DEMOCRATS" AT STRASBOURG. THE PCF CLEARLY FEARS THAT THIS TREND TOWARD IGNORING THE COMMON PROGRAM IN INTERNATIONAL BODIES WOULD BE ACCENTUATED WITH THE INSTITUTION OF A POPULARLY ELECTED PARLIAMENT. IT HAS THUS COME OUT SQUARELY AGAINST THE ROME DECISION IN LANGUAGE SIMILAR TO THAT ENUNCIATED BY DEBRE AND COMPANY. THE PS, FOR ITS PART, HAS SO FAR AVOIDED PUBLIC COMMENT ON THE ISSUE. NEVERTHELESS, GIVEN PAST PRONOUNCEMENTS, THE PS ALONG WITH THE THIRD COMMON PROGRAM PARTNER, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 PARIS 33586 232216Z

THE LEFT RADICALS, WILL BE HARD PUT TO AVOID ENDORSING 1978 ELECTIONS.

3. A SAFE ISSUE FOR GISCARD: THUS, THE ISSUE IS REMINISCENT OF PAST CONTESTS TOUCHING ON FRENCH "INDEPENDENCE"--WITH THE MEANS SQUARING OFF AGAINST THE EXTREMES. SEVERAL FACTORS WOULD SEEM TO PREDICT A VICTORY FOR THE MODERATES THIS TIME AROUND. FIRST,

POPULAR ELECTIONS FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIMENT WILL POSE NO IMMEDIATE THREAT TO FRENCH POCKETBOOKS. LIKE ABORTION AND THE LOWERED VOTING AGE, IT IS JUST THE SORT OF NO-COST REFORM WHICH GISCARD HAS SHOWN HIMSELF EMINENTLY CAPABLE OF PUSHING THROUGH. SECOND, PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC IS BACKING THE PRESIDENT AND HIS INFLUENCE SHOULD GO A LONG WAY TOWARD LIMITING GAULLIST DEFECTIONS TO THE DEBRE CAMP. AND FINALLY, AS WAS THE CASE ON ABORTION REFORM AND THE 18 YEAR OLD VOTE, A LARGE PORTION OF TTE OPPOSITION WILL PROBABLY RALLY TO THE CAUSE.

4. BUT NOT OUT OF THE WOODS YET: NEVERTHELESS, THE ISSUE IS ONE WHICH GISCARD WILL HAVE TO HANDLE CAREFULLY. OPPOSITION TO ANY THING THAT HINTS AT SUPRANATIONALITY IN FRENCH EUROPEAN POLICY -- IF SOMEWHAT DIMINISHED IN RECENT YEARS -- RETAINS A SPECIALL ATTRACTION IN SOME CIRCLES AND IS CERTAIN TO PRODUCE CONSIDERABLE PRESS COVERAGE. MOREOVER, THERE IS SOME QUESTION, ESPECIALLY AMONG DEBRE SUPPORTERS, OF THE CONSTITUTIONALITY OF DIRECT ELECTIONS TO A NON-FRENCH PARLIAMENT AND IT IS LIKELY THAT OPPONENTS WILL BE ABLE TO REQUEST A RULING FROM THE CONSTITUTIONAL COUNCIL ON THE QUESTION. IF THE COUNCIL RULES THE MEASURE UNCONSTITUTIONAL (AN UNLIKELY OUTCOME, ACCORDING TO MOST JURISTS) GISCARD COULD THEN SUBMIT THE MEASURE AS A LAW TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OR CALL FOR A REFERENDUM. EVEN IF THE COUNCIL SHOULD RULE DIRECT ELECTIONS CONSTITUTIONAL, GISCARD MIGHT WANT TO OPT FOR APPROVAL BY THE ASEMBLY OR REFERENDUM TO REMOVE ANY DOUBTS AS TO WHERE THE NATION STANDS ON THE ISSUE.

5. THUS OVER THE SHORT RUN AT LEAST, THE GOVERNMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 PARIS 33586 232216Z

SEEMS TO VIEW LOW KEY TREATMENT AS THE BEST TACTIC -- DOWNPLAYING THE ISSUE FOR THE MOMENT WHILE GIVING THE PCF AND GAULLIST HARDLINERS ENOUGH LEEWAY TO EXPEND THEMSELVES ON AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS CCME.
GAMMON

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